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ABSTRACT

This study investigated the practice teaching experiences of Bachelor of Education (Design and Technology) students at the University of Newcastle (Australia) to determine what they saw as successful and unsuccessful events. Eleven second-year students at the University of Newcastle were asked to write about one successful and one unsuccessful experience on each day of their 4-week practicum, and were asked to reflect on their experiences weekly. Major categories of successful events included pupil behavior, pupil learning, personal feelings of the student teacher, interactions with other teachers, and praise from supervising teachers. Over 60 percent of successful events related to what the student teachers saw as appropriate student behavior; only 20 percent mentioned student learning. Student teachers saw themselves predominantly as being responsible for the successful events. Over half of the comments student teachers made about unsuccessful events were related to inappropriate student behavior, and about 14 percent of comments about unsuccessful events made reference to student learning. Student teachers seemed reluctant to accept blame for unsuccessful events. Few students described successful events in terms of the components of effective teaching commonly mentioned in the literature (e.g., clarity, enthusiasm, structure, and task orientation). (Contains 15 references.) (JDD)

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STUDENT TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF SUCCESSFUL AND UNSUCCESSFUL EVENTS DURING PRACTICE TEACHING

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INTRODUCTION

Most teacher educators would like to think that practice teaching is a rewarding experience that provides students with

> . . . a comprehensive range of school and teaching experiences related directly to the professional roles they will be eligible to perform as beginning teachers, (that it) . . . should be a carefully planned learning experience which is integrated with the campus-based component of the teacher education program, (and that) . . . the practicum should provide opportunities for student teachers to enrich their understanding of theories and principles of teaching and learning through observation, implementation and reflection. (Australian Teacher Education Association, 1994).

For some students, this ideal is achieved, but, for a variety of reasons, many students find that their practice teaching experiences and performance fall short of their expectations and those of their teacher educators (Duffy, 1987; Wong, 1990). When student teachers make comments such as, "The kids know I am a prac teacher, and as soon as I enter the room they begin being smart and trying to put me down", or "I felt like I had no control", or "I feel that students don't respect teachers any more", or "This lesson would have to rate as the single worst of my teaching experiences"[1], it is important for teacher educators to know why student teachers feel this way, and to be able to help these prospective teachers to deal with these problems. It is equally important to know why student teachers would make comments such as the following which clearly indicate a feeling of satisfaction with their practicum teaching experiences: "I don't know how this incident will affect my future teaching, but it did make me feel like a real teacher", or "Despite the fact that we did not cover all the work I had planned, I would still rate this lesson as successful", or "After this lesson I felt great". All these comments reveal something of the feelings of the student teachers who made them, but they also have the potential to reveal something of their beliefs, their aspirations, and their perceptions of teaching - factors that have very important influences on classroom practices (McDiarmid, 1990; Evans & Tribble, 1986; Tabachnick & Zeichner, 1984).

The perspectives from which student teachers view teaching situations can determine how classroom events are experienced and interpreted (Goodman, 1988). These interpretations can either enhance or call into question the student teachers' confidence in their ability to teach. Given that many students enter teacher education courses with unrealistic confidence in their ability to teach and unrealistic views about the difficulties of teaching (Richards & Killen, 1993; Weinstein, 1988; Book, Byers & Freeman, 1983), it is important for teacher educators to know what practicum experiences are reinforcing these views.

[1] These quotes are all from students who were interviewed during their practicum (see methods section).

The purpose of the study described in this paper was to investigate the practice teaching experiences of a group of Bachelor of Education (Design and Technology) students, with a view to determining what they saw as successful and unsuccessful events during a practicum. It was hypothesised that their descriptions of these events would reveal something of their beliefs about teaching and also provide a basis for prompting them to question the basic assumptions they made about teaching. This latter outcome is a long term goal. This paper reports on only the first stage of a longitudinal study and focuses on describing and classifying the student teachers' perceptions of successful and unsuccessful events that they experienced or observed during practice teaching.

METHODS

Subjects

Data for this study were gathered from 11 second year students (2 female and 9 male, aged between 21 and 23 years) in the Bachelor of Education (Design and Technology) course at the University of Newcastle. This is a four-year integrated program in which students study both the subject they will eventually teach (in this case Design and Technology), educational foundations (psychology, sociology, and so on), and pedagogy (both generic and subject specific). During each of the first three years of the course, the students spend a four-week block practice period in a high school. In the final year, they spend a ten-week internship in a high school.

Data gathering

During the 1993 practicum, the subjects were asked to keep journals of their practice teaching experiences. Specifically, they were asked to write about one successful and one unsuccessful experience on each day of their four-week practicum. The successful and unsuccessful events could be either something which happened to them (in their own classroom or outside of the classroom), or something which they had observed (in another teacher's classroom or somewhere else in the school). They were also asked to reflect on their experiences at the end of each week of the practicum and to write about what they thought they had learned about teaching during that week. Of the 11 students in the study, 9 made daily journal entries and the other 2 students (1 male and 1 female) made irregular entries. Some students kept their journals up to and including the last day of the practicum and some finished one or two days early because that was the last day on which they had contact with their supervising lecturer. As a result, the student teachers made journal entries about a total of 141 successful events and a total of 110 unsuccessful events.

During the first two days of the practicum, the researcher visited each student teacher, discussed with them the practicum requirements, and explained how and why the journals were

to be kept. Each student was observed teaching on either three or four occasions during the practicum, and each observation was followed by a discussion of the lesson and of the student's other practicum experiences. The researcher read the journal entries on each visit, but discussed only those entries that related directly to things that the student teacher raised in general conversation. This was done so that the type of journal entry being made, and the focus of these entries, would not be influenced by the researcher.

Analysis of the journal entries

At the end of the practicum, each journal entry was transcribed and analysed in order to identify consistent themes in the entries of each student and common themes across the sample of students. The analysis of each journal entry was done in several stages. Firstly, each entry was described by a phrase that classified the successful/unsuccessful event that was being described by the student teacher. Where possible, this description was supported by a quotation from the entry to indicate why the student teacher had seen the event as successful of unsuccessful. For example, Table 1 is a summary of the general theme of the entries which one student made when describing her successful events, including the quotes which indicate why she thought these events were successful. This procedure was designed to identify themes in the entries of each student and similarities or differences in the themes of all the students. It is clear from Table 1, for example, that the common theme in the entries of this student is her concern to have students involved in her lessons. The reasons that she gives for her successes (given in brackets in Table 1 on page 4) clearly indicate that she generally considers success to result from things that she did when preparing or delivering her lessons.

After each entry was classified in this general way, it was analysed in detail to identify specific words and phases which the student teacher had used to describe the successful and unsuccessful events and the reasons why these events occurred. Each new word or phrase was entered into a spreadsheet so that tallies could be kept of the number of times that each factor was mentioned and each reason was given. Examples of these phrases were, "students enjoyed the lesson", "students worked quietly", "students fighting", "students underachieving", "ability level of students" and "students not mature".

When all the journal entries had been analysed, the factors that had been identified as key elements of the successful and unsuccessful events were grouped under common broad headings and more specific subheadings. A similar grouping was made of the reasons that student teachers gave for the success or lack of success of each event.

Table 1: Sample of themes in the journal entries of one student, and reasons that she gave for her successes.

1. Pupils were interested in the lesson. ("I had set up two displays on the pinboards, consisting of two of my design folios from University design projects.")
2. Pupils were interested and participated. ("The format of this lesson was a mixture of theory and brainstorming for ideas.")
3. Pupils completed planned work. ("The class began on time . . instructions were given out . . . little prompting was required for any of the students.")
4. Planned work was completed by students. ("The class worked extremely well because they are able students and it was first period.")
5. Pupils worked productively and quietly. ("Prior to the lesson, I outlined clearly my expectations of them for the lesson and gave them instructions.")
6. Pupils were enthusiastic about the learning activities. ("Students responded enthusiastically to the chance to participate in practical research activities.")
7. Pupils were enthusiastic and the outcome was successful. ("Despite the fact that we did not cover all the work I had planned I would still rate this lesson as successful. The activity that corresponded to the theory was tackled with enthusiasm, the students gave the impression of enjoying the task and the end result was well done.")
8. Pupils reacted positively to the teaching methods. ("Visual and tactile display of the five food groups had a positive reaction, pupils immediately began to ask what they were.")
9. Pupils working well with no behaviour problems. ("In the previous lesson I had praised the whole class and informed them that if they could keep their behaviour and work at this standard I would have a surprise for them on Friday.")
10. All students completed the required work. ("The positive consequence for this lesson was to complete all planning and written work so that they could cook the next lesson. This was foreshadowed upon commencement of the lesson and was a very effective form of motivation.")

RESULTS

The student teachers described a total of 141 successful and 110 unsuccessful events. Many of these descriptions mentioned several factors (such as students working quietly and producing high quality work). In the summaries that follow, these multiple factors are counted as separate entries. For convenience, the successful and unsuccessful events will be described separately, although in many cases they were linked closely by the student teachers. For example, one student teacher recognised that a particular event could be seen both as successful because "I was fully prepared and enthusiastic" and unsuccessful because "I forgot to explain two of the key concepts".

Successful events

Of the 141 successful events described by the student teachers, 131 (93%) occurred in their own classrooms, 5 occurred in classrooms which they had been observing, and 5 occurred elsewhere in the school (all involving the student teacher directly). A total of 180 distinct factors were mentioned by students when they were describing the 141 successful events. These factors fell into five broad categories and Table 2 indicates the percentage of factors in each category.

Table 2: Major categories of successful events.

Category	No. of entries	Percentage of total entries
Student Behaviour	109	60.6
Student Learning	36	20.0
Personal Feelings of Student Teacher	24	13.3
Interactions with other teachers	8	4.4
Praise from Supervising Teacher	3	1.7

The most obvious feature of the summary in Table 2 is that *just over 60% of all the factors mentioned by student teachers when describing successful events were related to what the student teachers saw as appropriate student behaviour.* In stark contrast, *only 20% of the factors mentioned in descriptions of successful events mentioned any aspect of student learning.* Almost as many entries (13.3%) were general statements such as "I felt good about this lesson", without any clear indication of why this feeling occurred. A very small number of successful events (4.4%) described how the student teacher had interacted with other teachers (e.g. "other teachers were interested in my teaching strategies"). Only two student teachers mentioned that they had received any praise from their supervising teacher.

The ten factors most frequently mentioned in the descriptions of successful events are summarised in Table 3; seven of them relate to student behaviour, two relate to students completing required work (which may or may not imply student learning), and one is a general statement about how the student teacher felt.

Table 3: The ten factors most frequently mentioned in descriptions of successful events.

Factor contributing to success	Broad category	No. times this factor was mentioned	Percentage of total number of factors mentioned
Students working productively	Student behaviour	18	10.0
Students interested/enthusiastic/wanted to be involved	Student behaviour	16	8.9
Students attentive/listening	Student behaviour	15	8.3
Students produced required results/products	Student effort	15	8.3
Students doing what I told them/following my instructions	Student behaviour	7	3.9
Students reacted positively to discipline strategies	Student behaviour	7	3.9
No major discipline problems	Student behaviour	6	3.3
Planned work completed by students	Student effort	6	3.3
Student teacher felt the lesson went very well	Teacher feelings	6	3.3
Anticipated difficulties did not arise	Student behaviour	5	2.8

In addition to describing successful events, the student teachers were asked to describe what they thought contributed to these successes. The ten most frequently mentioned reasons for the successful events are listed in Table 4. The top nine of these ten reasons attribute success to things that the student teachers did (and account for 62% of all the reasons given). That is, *they predominantly saw themselves as being responsible for the successful events they were describing*. Overall, 99 (86%) of the 115 reasons that students gave for the success of the events they were describing were either things that the student teachers did (such as "I was very well prepared for the lesson") or things that were under their control (such as, "I have a great deal of experience on computers"). A further 4 (3.5%) reasons were attributed to the students (such as "ability level of the students") and 7 (6%) were attributed to the regular class teacher (e.g. "the experience of the supervising teacher").

Table 4: The ten most frequently mentioned reasons for successful events.

Reason given for success	No. times this reason was mentioned	Percentage of total number of reasons
Student teacher well prepared for the lesson	16	13.9
Student teacher used appropriate discipline strategies	13	11.3
Student teacher used a variety of teaching methods	7	6.1
Student teacher motivated pupils	7	6.1
Student teacher sought advice	7	6.1
Student teacher used variety of examples/aids	6	5.2
Student teacher knew a lot about the subject	5	4.3
Student teacher showed initiative	5	4.3
Student teacher built up rapport with students	5	4.3
Experience of supervising teacher	4	3.5

Note: A total of 115 reasons were given for successful events.

Unsuccessful Events

Of the 110 unsuccessful events described by the student teachers, 93 (84%) occurred in their own classrooms, 5 occurred in classrooms that they had been observing, and 12 occurred elsewhere in the school (and involved the student teacher directly). A total of 151 distinct factors were mentioned when describing the 110 unsuccessful events. These factors fell into four broad categories and Table 5 indicates the percentage of factors in each category.

Table 5: Major categories of unsuccessful events.

Category	No. of entries	Percentage of total entries
Student Behaviour	85	56.3
Teacher actions/feelings	41	27.2
Student Learning	21	13.9
Student Activities	4	2.6

As was the case with successful events, *the majority (56.3%) of the comments student teachers made about unsuccessful events were related to what the student teachers saw as inappropriate student behaviour*. As before, *a relatively small proportion (13.9%) of the student teachers' comments about unsuccessful events made reference to student learning*. The proportion of general comments (27.2%) such as "I felt disappointed with the lesson", was quite high; again without any clear indication of why these feelings occurred. Only a very small proportion (2.6%) of the comments about unsuccessful events concerned interaction between the student teachers and experienced teachers (as had happened in relation to successful events).

The ten factors most frequently mentioned in the descriptions of unsuccessful events are summarised in Table 6; six of them relate to student behaviour, one relates to students not completing required work (which may or may not imply lack of student learning), two are general statements about how the student teacher felt, and one refers to lack of student understanding.

Table 6: The ten factors most frequently mentioned in student teachers' descriptions of unsuccessful events.

Factor contributing to lack of success	Broad category	No. Times this factor was mentioned	Percentage of total number of factors mentioned
Students disruptive	Student behaviour	27	17.9
Students not interested in practical work	Student behaviour	11	7.3
Student teacher feeling of disappointment	Teacher feelings	10	6.6
Planned work for the lesson not completed	Student work	9	6.0
Students fighting	Student behaviour	7	4.6
Not all students understood the lesson	Student learning	5	3.3
Student teacher did not deal properly with a problem	Teacher feelings	5	3.3
Students restless and talkative	Student behaviour	4	2.6
Students difficult to keep on task	Student behaviour	4	2.6
Student had to be removed from class	Student behaviour	4	2.6

Note: A total of 151 distinct factors were mentioned when describing unsuccessful events. (Statements such as "students were noisy and disobedient" were counted as two factors on the basis that these two things could occur separately.)

In addition to describing unsuccessful events, the student teachers were asked to describe what they thought contributed to these problems. The ten most frequently mentioned reasons for the unsuccessful events are listed in Table 7. In contrast to the student teachers' willingness to claim credit for successful events, they seemed somewhat reluctant to accept blame for unsuccessful events. Table 7 shows blame being attributed to the students, and to the regular class teacher, in five of the top ten reasons for lack of success.

Table 7: Ten most frequently mentioned reasons for unsuccessful events.

Reason given for success	No. times this reason was mentioned	Percentage of total number of reasons
Pupil "tried out" the student teacher	10	9.4
Insufficient planning by student teacher	9	8.5
Pupil apathy	8	7.5
Student teachers' lack of subject matter knowledge	7	6.6
Student teacher used inappropriate/ineffective teaching strategies	4	3.8
Class teachers reject Design and Technology	4	3.8
Class teacher using inappropriate discipline strategy	4	3.8
Regular teacher had not motivated pupils	3	2.8
Student teacher disciplined a pupil harshly	3	2.8
Student teacher forgot to do something	2	1.9

Note: A total of 106 reasons were given for unsuccessful events.

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Overall, only 45 (42%) of the 106 reasons that students gave for the unsuccessful events they described were expressed in terms which indicated that the student teacher accepted responsibility for the problem. A further 35 (33%) reasons placed the blame for lack of success on the students. These reasons were expressed in terms such as "the students were apathetic", "the students had a low attention span", "the students don't understand the importance of learning", and "the students were not mature". The regular class teacher was blamed for 19 (18%) of the unsuccessful events, in terms such as "the class teacher has an inappropriate discipline strategy", "the class teacher had not motivated the students", and "the class teacher is slack". The remaining reasons were quite various and included factors such as "stormy weather", "the time of day" and "politics within the school".

There was a clear tendency for the student teachers in this sample to be more willing to claim credit for their successful experiences than they were to accept responsibility for their unsuccessful experiences. Concurrently, they were far more inclined to blame students for unsuccessful events than they were to give students credit for successful events.

The most common issue raised in the descriptions of unsuccessful events was that of student behaviour. A total of 56% of the unsuccessful events that were described were concerned with issues of classroom control, management or discipline. This was particularly interesting since these second-year teacher education students had completed a one semester subject which focused on management and discipline immediately before starting their practicum. From their journal entries, it was obvious that they were experiencing many difficulties in trying to implement the discipline strategies that had been presented to them in their university-based coursework.

DISCUSSION

There was considerable consistency in the journal entries of each student teacher. For example, one male student mentioned his approach to discipline in three-quarters of the successful and unsuccessful events that he described. Another male student mentioned his rapport with students in half of the successful events that he described. Similar consistency was obvious in the journal entries of most of the other student teachers, as indicated in Table 8 (where the nominated themes for each student were mentioned in at least one-third of the journal entries of that student).

The common themes running through the journal entries of individual student teachers tend to suggest that the views of teaching that these student teachers have are influenced by rather strong beliefs, for example, a belief that rapport with students is important, or a belief that students should always be kept under control. The diversity of these beliefs suggests that these student teachers may have held these beliefs before they entered their teacher education

program. The presence and strength of such preconceived beliefs about teaching has been well documented elsewhere (see for example, Lortie, 1975; Feiman-Nemser, 1983).

Table 8: Common themes in journal entries of each student teacher.

Student Teacher	Sex	Theme in journal entries
1	male	Student discipline is a problem (which he does not know how to deal with).
2	female	Student interest and involvement are necessary if they are to complete required work.
3	male	Detailed preparation and firm discipline strategies lead to successful lessons.
4	male	Dissatisfaction with supervising teacher who was seen to be too concerned with just keeping students busy.
5	male	Success depends on student teacher's efforts.
6	male	Students are always taking advantage of student teachers.
7	male	Rapport with students is the key to successful teaching.
8	male	No obvious theme.
9	male	Success depends on student interest.
10	male	Student misbehaviour is beyond the control of teachers.
11	female	Students are enthusiastic in successful lessons and bored in unsuccessful lessons.

It was interesting that few students described successful events in their teaching in terms of the components of effective teaching commonly mentioned in the literature (e.g. clarity, enthusiasm, structure, variety, task orientation, and so on). For example, few student teachers seemed to appreciate the importance of their being enthusiastic about the subjects they taught. Only one mentioned it as a reason for a lesson being successful. Similarly, only one student mentioned that the lesson was successful because he structured it carefully ("I believe the students worked to their full potential because I structured the lesson even though it was practical").

Few of the student teachers mentioned student learning in their descriptions of successful or unsuccessful events. Almost invariably, success (or lack of success) in class was described in terms of activities (students speaking, behaving, listening, etc) rather than in terms of student outcomes. None of the students teachers mentioned any changes in the knowledge or skills of the students they were teaching. It appears that the student teachers' levels of concern about survival, control, and student activities were far greater than their concern about the achievements of their students.

For several students, success was described in terms of anticipated difficulties not arising. For example, one student teacher wrote, "One particular student has been a problem constantly over the time I have been taking this class. However, today he was so well behaved I thought it must have been an impostor". Another wrote, "Even though he came in late and I pounced on him straight away, he still wanted to do some work and was obedient, which is very unlike him". Both these entries indicate a level of surprise and suggest that there was little planning to avoid the anticipated problems. These journal entries are in stark contrast with this entry from another student teacher, "Even though the lesson was quite detailed and involved, I was able to get all the information across to the students. I believe this lesson was successful because I rehearsed some of the points at home and thoroughly researched the topic. The students were interested and motivated".

For some students, the experience of practice teaching helped to reinforce the theory that they had been learning at university. For example, one student teacher wrote "I know from Pedagogy that variety is a key point of learning, but it isn't until you realise the diversity of students' learning that this becomes a reality." However, the failure of some others to make these links was typified by the comment "When my methods weren't working I had nothing up my sleeve". It seemed that for several of the students in this study, the realities of the classroom overcame their ability to recall and apply theoretical knowledge, or to come to grips with what Alvermann (1981) referred to as the "dissonance between theory and practice" (p.24).

Some student teachers took very mature approaches to the problems with which they were faced. One of the female students had no previous experience in the subject area in which she had to teach, yet she turned this into a positive experience as indicated in the following journal entry:

> Today, I taught my first woodwork class. The students were quite apprehensive at first. I started the lesson by telling the students that I was a practice teacher, that my experience lay more in the Home Economics area (not woodwork), and that I was still learning, however, this doesn't mean I am incompetent. The students responded well, they were even more enthusiastic when they discovered that I could actually do the skills involved in woodwork. I believe that the students' enthusiasm was due to the fact that I was still learning and I could see clearly the learning process I had to go through to achieve the skill and therefore could incorporate that procedure into my lesson plans. After all, looking at the steps in learning something is a necessary part of teaching.

In contrast, one of the male students had great difficulty even though he was teaching a subject with which he was familiar:

> I couldn't gain control of the class, even though I had taught similar material to another class earlier in the day. I had not expected the students to behave as badly. I found it very difficult, next to impossible, to teach the material as I was quite confused and lost direction of where I was going. This led to the class being on top of the situation.

One of the reasons for conducting this research was to try to identify whether or not journal entries of successful and unsuccessful events could be used to indicate any form of growth for the student teachers, that is, growth in relation to their knowledge about teaching or growth in their approach towards teaching and in their acceptance of responsibilities of teaching. There were many occasions where student teachers made comments such as "I have learnt from this that it is important to listen to your students, they are the only ones that know why they are behaving the way they are". Such comments suggest that the student teachers were learning from their experiences. However, no overall changes in their approaches to teaching were evident in their journal entries. None of them described a successful event in a way which indicated they had learnt something from an earlier unsuccessful experience. Further, any learning that did occur seemed to be seen by the student teachers as an isolated event that was not placed into any general framework or approach to teaching. This is not really surprising because, as Berliner (1986) observes, teaching expertise "is developed over long periods of time, say hundreds, perhaps thousands of hours of learning and experience" (p.12). Any slight indication that such learning is occurring during a four-week practicum should probably be regarded as a bonus.

The quality of writing in the journals varied considerably, but all were sufficiently detailed to provide useful information. The students had not received instruction in journal writing prior to the practicum; for future research this would be advisable. Similarly, the student teachers would probably benefit from prior development of their ability to reflect on their experiences, perhaps through the use of techniques similar to those described by Killen (1991). In general, the students in this study appeared not to be capable of reflecting at any level greater than simple description.

CONCLUSION

This study provided a window into the experiences of a small group of preservice teachers, and revealed a great variety in their views of teaching, their perceptions of the control they have over their teaching experiences, and their beliefs about teaching and learning. Because it involved only a few student teachers who had not been trained in journal writing or critical reflection, the findings cannot be generalised. At best, the study provides an indication of the rich field of data that might be tapped by a larger study using more refined methods.

However limited the study might be, it did suggest a need for further research. In particular, it points to a strong need for teacher educators to become more aware of the potential value in helping student teachers to reflect on their practicum experiences and to try to make sense of those experiences in light of the theoretical knowledge that they should be gaining from their teacher education program.

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